

# EBR area pushes for more representation

BY MARSHA SHULER  
Capitol news bureau

Baton Rouge area officials pushed Monday for greater political influence as new legislative election district lines are drawn to align them with population shifts.

Baton Rouge Mayor-President Kip Holden told lawmakers in charge of drawing district lines that population increases in the area warrant expanded representation.

"Make sure we are not on an island alone," Holden said, "...where the East Baton Rouge vote does not make a differ-

ence."

Three of the 39 state Senate districts and eight of the 105 House districts are wholly in East Baton Rouge. A few others include parts of surrounding parishes.

Baton Rouge Area Chamber President Adam Knapp noted that the nine parishes in and around the Capital City have grown almost 100,000 people since the 2000 census. "Our nine parishes should be represented at a great level," Knapp said.

Holden and Knapp were among the 13 people to testify during the fourth of nine public

hearings around the state called to gather public opinion on how to redraw legislative, congressional and other election districts.

The redistricting process must be done every decade, based on the U.S. Census, to ensure that each person's vote carries as much electoral weight as the next person's.

The Louisiana Legislature will hold a special redistricting session March 20 to April 13.

Legislative election maps must be redrawn to equalize populations with some shrinking in geographic area and oth-

ADV FEB 22 2011

ers expanding. The ideal population for a House district is 43,174 and 116,240 for a Senate district. Mappers must come within 5 percent, plus or minus, of the number.

Legislators also seat six congressional districts — instead of the current seven — because of sluggish population growth.

Some witnesses had specific suggestions for the lawmakers.

Jason Decuir said the black population in Baton Rouge warrants a fifth majority black legislative district in the House.

► See REPRESENTATION page 3A



Advocate staff photo by GAVIN JACKSON

Secretary of the Senate Glenn Koepp, left, speaks Monday with Baton Rouge Mayor Kip Holden before a public meeting at Baton Rouge Community College. Members of the Louisiana House and Senate committees on Governmental Affairs are holding public hearings around the state to receive feedback on their plans to redraw the districts from which government officials are elected.

## REPRESENTATION

Continued from page 1A

He suggested with overall growth of black residents in House districts represented by white Republicans, a new minority district could easily be excised in the southern part of the parish.

Prospective legislative candidate Larry Thomas said state Senate District 17 should be left "as close as we can to what it is now." The rural district includes areas of Iberville, Pointe Coupee, St. Helena, East and West Baton Rouge and East Feliciana. It is represented by term-limited state Sen.

Rob Marionneaux, D-Grosse Tete.

"The way the district is drawn right now truly represents us," agreed another district resident Scott Byrd.

Pointe Coupee parish administrator Jimmy Bello asked lawmakers to keep Pointe Coupee Parish whole as it readjusts lines in the capital region.

St. Helena Parish Police Juror Major Coleman said his parish is tired of being split up between two House and Senate districts. "We are already an island as it is. When you split us up, we are smaller numbers," Coleman said.

Monica Taylor with the Greater Baton Rouge AFL-CIO

had a more general recommendation. "You need to think about putting people in districts with shared interests," Taylor said.

Hearings continue Tuesday

in Lake Charles and Lafayette, then wrap up next week in north Louisiana. The Lafayette meeting is at 6 p.m. at Acadiana Center for the Arts, Moncus Theatre.